Chapter 14

Diversity and Teacher Education:
Cultural and Linguistic Competency for Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' knowledge and skills in working with students of diverse backgrounds depend largely on their knowledge of ethnic groups and appreciation of culture and language differences. This chapter examined preservice teachers' preparation for diversity in a teacher education program at a university in southeastern United States. Study participants were preservice teachers enrolled in an education course in the school of education at the said university. Thirty preservice teachers' semester long reflections from a diversity education course were collected and analyzed. Two questions guided the discussion of the chapter: 1) What was the learning experience of preservice teachers in the course? 2) What was the collective conscience of preservice teachers on teaching students in increasingly diverse classrooms? The findings revealed that the course experiences facilitated preservice teachers' critical thinking skills on history, cultural identity, family and language difference, ethnic experiences. Implications on diversity in education were discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The world is changing rapidly and is becoming increasingly diverse. So are K-12 education classrooms. One of the priorities for K-12 teachers and educators is to teach all students to be college ready and career ready in the global economy. In the United States, the K-12 Common Core State Standards are a clear indication of this priority. During his speech at a Hispanic Chamber of Commerce meeting in 2009, President Barack Obama stated:

America will not remain true to its highest ideals-and America's place as a global economic leader will be put at risk if we do not do a far better job than we've been doing in educating our sons and daughters…. unless we give them the knowledge and skills they need in this new and changing world. (The White House, 2009)

The inevitability of global diversification and its corresponding imperatives highlight the need for educators to integrate multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, and linguistic knowledge and methods into teacher education programs. In a constantly changing world, no single culture or human race can thrive without the help of the global population within which it is situated. Despite this recognition, certain populations continue to have greater societal benefits than others because of race, ethnicity, gender, class, language, religion, ability, or age (Boutte, 2008). This reality creates concern about teachers' capacity to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students, and to address disparities among preservice teachers. These disparities present themselves in the self-efficacy required by teachers as they model and practice culturally responsive teaching and respond to the challenges of hegemonic norms and practices in K-12 schools (Pearce, 2012; Siwatu, 2011). In this chapter, I examined the preparation of preservice teachers'on diversity in the classroom in a teacher education program in southeastern United States. Below, I present the background to the study, procedures followed, and findings from the study. I conclude with implications of cultural and linguistic diversity training to teacher education.

BACKGROUND

In teacher education, one of the responsibilities of teacher educators is to prepare and equip preservice teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to address culturally diverse learners. It has been widely understood that education is the fertilizer for preservice teachers to learn and grow. Teacher preparation programs serve as a major foundation for this process. These programs prepare teachers to learn to accept the varying languages, lifestyles, and cultures of a myriad of ethnic groups and to model culturally responsive practices in the classroom. The core of that training is echoed in the observation by Koppleman and Goodhard (2008) in that culturally responsive education is to challenge teachers "to think and talk about issues that each of us must consider as citizens in a multicultural society….to challenge attitudes based on incomplete or erroneous information" (p. xxiv).

In keeping with this requirement, discussion and appreciation of diversity in the classroom can only be taught in an authentic and democratic atmosphere. Such a learning environment augments the fundamental principles of learning with discussions on human rights, acceptance, respect, tolerance, anti-discrimination, citizenship, moral education, and the recognition of ideological, social, linguistic, cultural, and political diversity. Through authentic democratic dialogue, a resolution can be realized that no certain narratives are more valuable than others and that all should be equally appreciated as representations of commonality-humanity (Kolstrein, 2011).

Davis (2010) proposed the Oneness of Humankind as the philosophical foundation for continued dialogue and mutual understanding of differences. In arguing for this proposition, the author maintains that not only can White individuals exercise racism, but that other groups of human beings, given the same history and circumstances, can behave in similar ways. She contends that to teach children of human races requires teachers to see beyond difference and division, and reflection on, and acceptance of, all races and cultures in the teaching and learning process. With mutual, reciprocal knowledge, and

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